

Geoffrey Beene

Frequently-asked Questions

Why is the Toledo Museum of Art displaying clothing?

Like buildings, clothes form the environment in which we live our lives. Also like buildings, clothes can be simple, functional, and without any pretensions or they can be something more. A garage is just a building in which we store a car; Frank Gehry's University of Toledo Center for the Visual Arts, on the other hand, is more than just a building in which art classes are taught. It directs our vision and channels our emotions, leading us to a different understanding of the space in which we live our lives. It's a work of art.

It's the same with clothing. The clothes we wear to clean out the garage are meant to be practical. The clothes we choose for work or social occasions, however, are often intended to shape the impression others have of us. Like a fine piece of architecture, fine clothing channels the vision of others and expresses our sense of self and our values. When clothing attempts to express the ideas, vision, and values of a society, it becomes an art form. And art forms should be celebrated in museums.

Who is Geoffrey Beene?

Geoffrey Beene is one of the most innovative clothing designers of the 20th century. After beginning work in New York during the post-World War II boom, he designed garments that expressed a particularly American attitude toward clothing. His influence on American clothing design spread during the 1960s and 1970s and he continues to inspire designers today.

Why did the TMA choose Geoffrey Beene's clothing?

The human body, both male and female, has long been a subject in Western art. Through the centuries, artists have shown the human figure clothed and nude in a variety of poses and settings. In ancient Greek sculpture, it was at first considered inappropriate to show the female body in the nude. Instead, sculptors revealed the female figure by the way clothing clung to it. A sense of mood, status, or motion was conveyed by the style of clothing, the pattern of folds, and the way folds were drawn across the body. In many ways Geoffrey Beene uses actual clothing on real female bodies to convey the same ideas as ancient Greek sculptors working in marble or bronze.

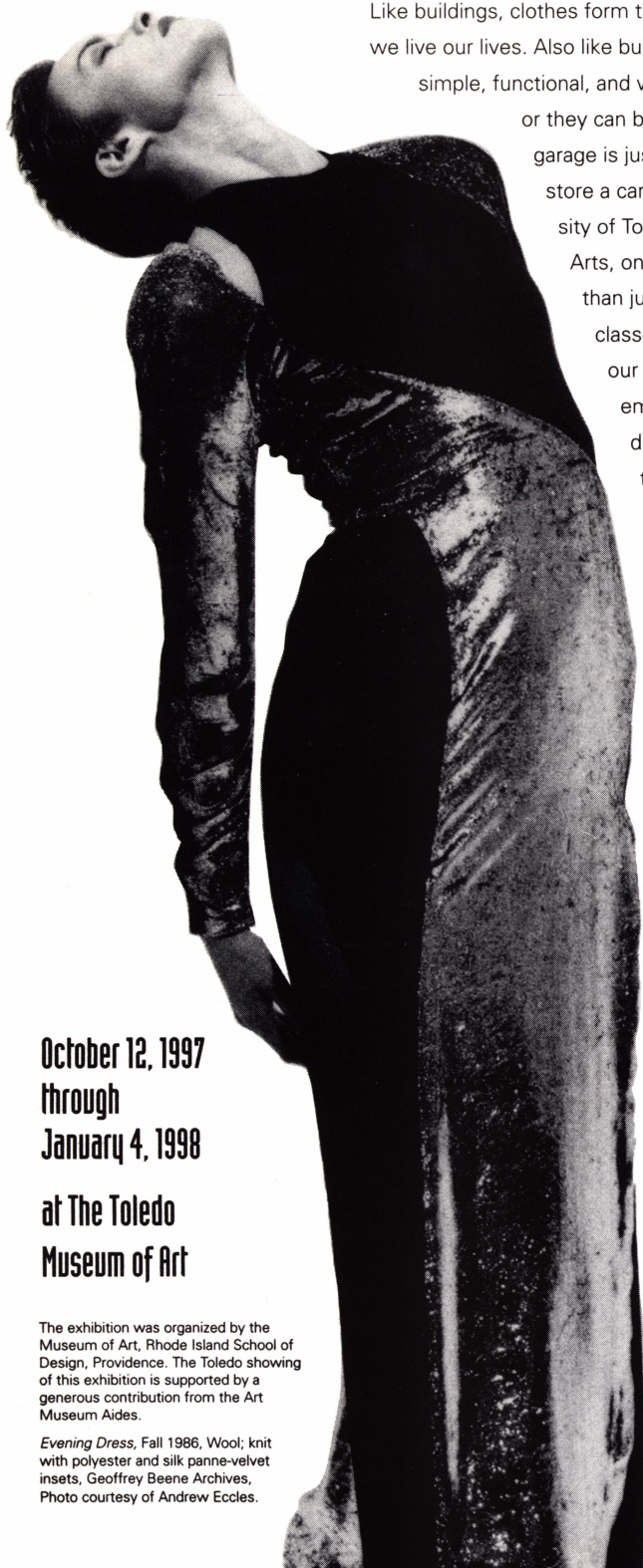
When Geoffrey Beene began work in the 1950's, most women's clothing was given its shape by darts, side seams, and padding. Beene broke with this tradition and shaped garments with tucks and pleats and cut garments in panels that wrapped around the body instead of bisecting it front and back. In addition to producing garments with a softer and more natural line, such techniques gave Beene a whole vocabulary of shapes, forms, and manipulations of the cloth. Beene used this vocabulary to create a mood or convey a sense of motion. In Beene's hands, clothing design became an expressive art form.

October 12, 1997
through
January 4, 1998

at The Toledo
Museum of Art

The exhibition was organized by the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. The Toledo showing of this exhibition is supported by a generous contribution from the Art Museum Aides.

Evening Dress, Fall 1986, Wool; knit with polyester and silk panne-velvet insets, Geoffrey Beene Archives, Photo courtesy of Andrew Eccles.



Glossary

bias ----- The diagonal across a length of fabric.

bolero ----- A loose, waist-length jacket open at the front.

box pleat ----- A double pleat formed by two facing folds.

couture ----- The sector of the fashion industry that designs and produces custom-made clothing for private customers; usually refers to the most expensive Paris dress-design establishments (houses), where unique garments are made to order with several fittings.

cut ----- The style or silhouette of a garment.

dart ----- Sewing term for a V-shaped tuck made to adjust the fit of a garment to the body.

doublecloth ----- A fabric produced by weaving two layers one above the other, and which at times intersect to produce a pattern or design.

drape ----- The way a particular cloth falls or hangs; Trade term for arranging and pinning cloth over a form to create the design of the intended garment.

matelassé ----- A doublecloth or compound fabric with a "blistered" surface.

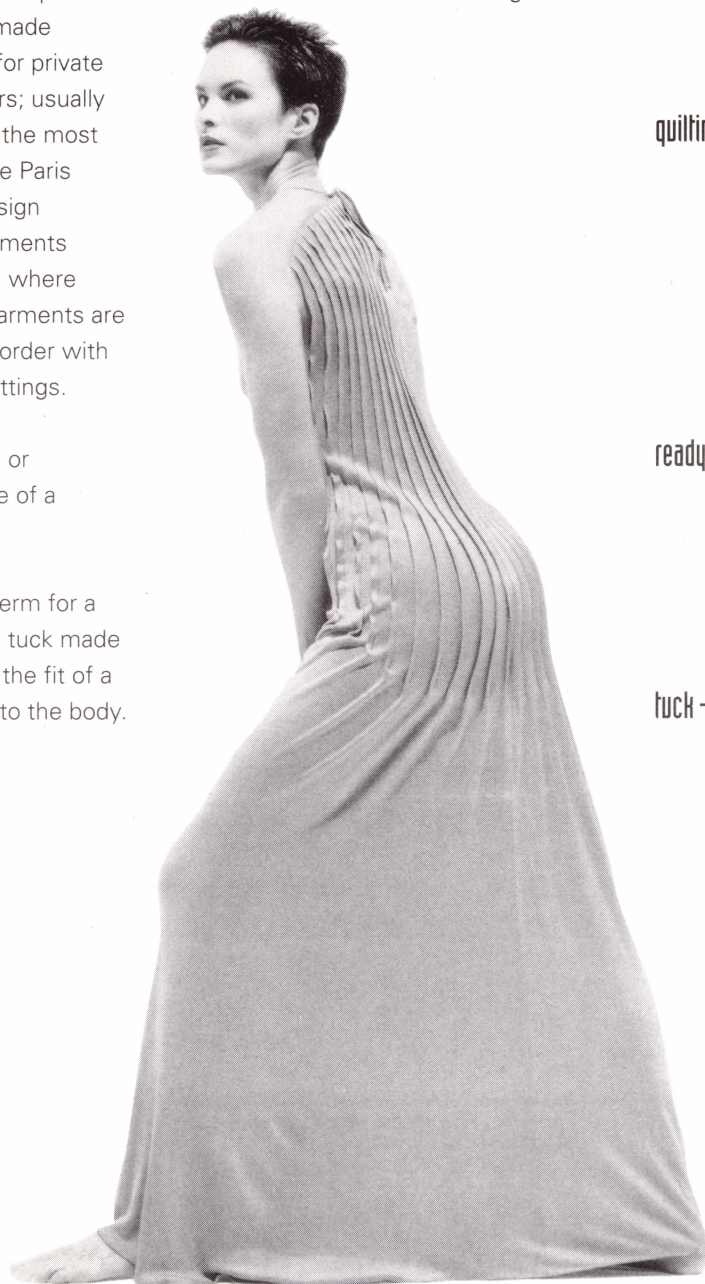
panné ----- A special finish for velvet or satin that produces a high luster.

pleat ----- A fold in cloth or other material, made by doubling the material upon itself and then pressing and/or stitching into place.

quilting ----- Stitching in a pattern through two or more layers of cloth, generally with batting made of cotton, wool, down, or synthetic fiber sandwiched between the layers.

ready-to-wear --- The sector of the fashion industry that mass-produces clothing in standard sizes; also called prêt à porter.

tuck ----- A flattened pleat or fold, especially a very narrow one, stitched in place.



Evening Dress, Fall 1975, Silk; knit jersey. Geoffrey Beene Archive. Photo courtesy of Andrew Eccles.

Art in America Following World War II

Geoffrey Beene began his career as an independent designer in New York City in the decade after World War II. It was during this period that America gained its status as one of the world's leading centers of artistic production and New York became its artistic capital. London and Berlin, which had been major western art centers prior to the war, had suffered great war damage, and the economies of Britain, France, and Germany had been badly set back. New York had suffered no damage and had even benefitted from the transport of soldiers and military supplies to Europe. At the end of the war, after a brief period of adjustment, the American economy boomed with the re-entry of soldiers into the civilian labor market and the easing of wartime restrictions. As America's financial and commercial center, New York profited from the country's growing economic and political importance.

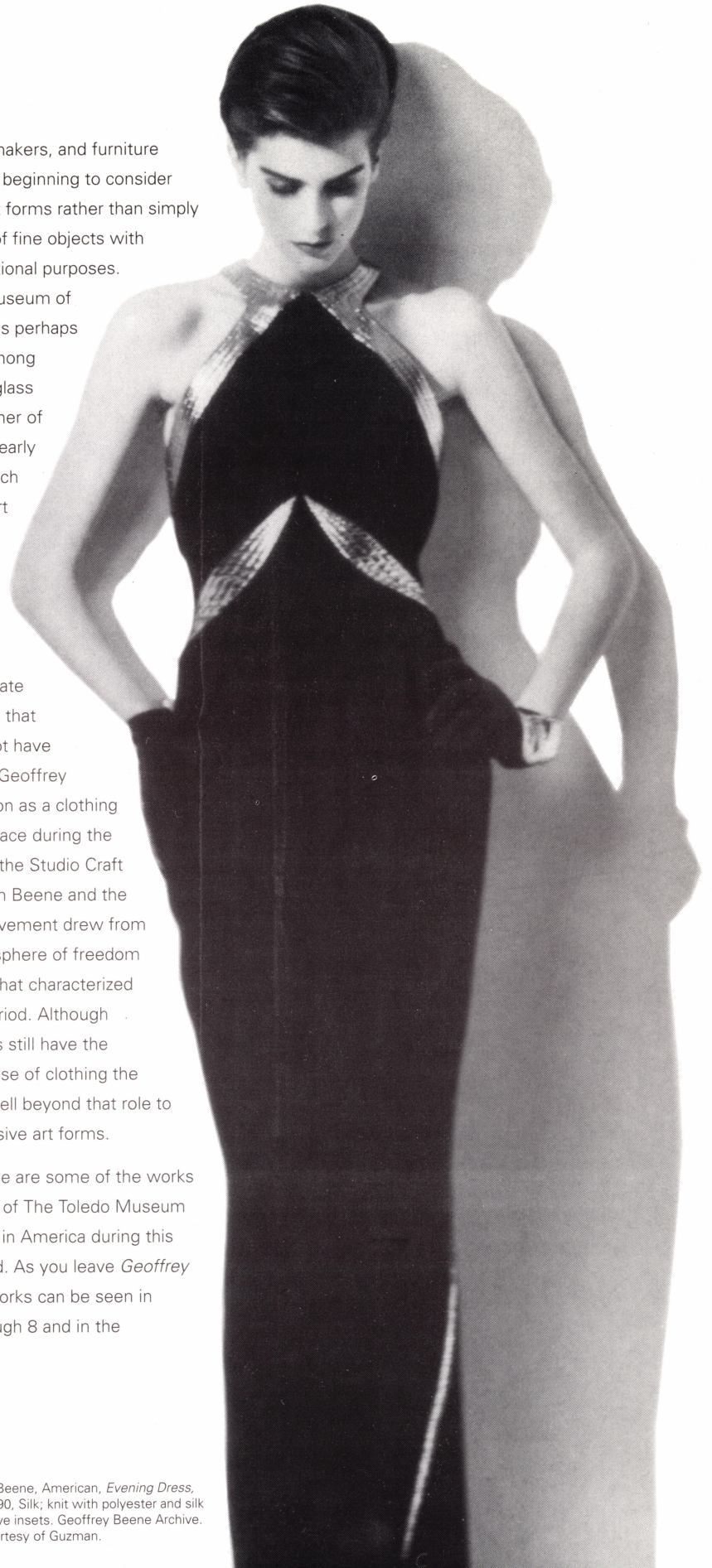
The American art world had also been influenced by the chaos that swept across Europe in the late 1930s. Prominent artists who opposed Hitler fled Europe to America and some stayed after the war's end. In New York City after the war, these expatriate European artists were joined by American artists. Together they formed the nucleus of a growing art center. Thus in New York during this period were gathered an array of artists and a growing number of patrons who could afford to purchase their work. America was no longer a province of the European art world. It became the world's most influential art producer and New York was its center.

At the same time that the fine arts in America were growing and maturing, the so-called craft arts were entering a period of reappraisal and change known as the Studio Craft movement. Ceramicists,

weavers, glassmakers, and furniture makers were all beginning to consider their work as art forms rather than simply the production of fine objects with essentially functional purposes.

In the Toledo Museum of Art this change is perhaps most evident among glass artists. A glass worker or designer of the late 19th or early 20th century, such as Louis Comfort Tiffany, created beautiful objects that had functional purposes. Glass artists today create glass sculptures that frequently do not have utilitarian roles. Geoffrey Beene's evolution as a clothing designer took place during the same period as the Studio Craft movement. Both Beene and the Studio Craft movement drew from the same atmosphere of freedom and innovation that characterized the post-war period. Although Beene's designs still have the functional purpose of clothing the body, they go well beyond that role to become expressive art forms.

On the next page are some of the works in the collection of The Toledo Museum of Art produced in America during this important period. As you leave *Geoffrey Beene*, these works can be seen in Galleries 5 through 8 and in the Glass Galleries.



Geoffrey Beene, American, *Evening Dress*, Spring 1990, Silk; knit with polyester and silk plain-weave insets. Geoffrey Beene Archive. Photo courtesy of Guzman.

Post-War American Art in the TMA

Gallery 5

Jacob Lawrence (American)

Barbershop (1946)

gouache on paper

Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1975.15



GALLERY 6

**Charles Eames, designer
(American), manufactured by
Evans Products Company**

DWC Chair (1946-47)

Ash plywood, laminated and molded;
rubber shockmounts, 1987.191

GALLERY 7

George Nelson (American)

Miniature Chest (1954-63), walnut;
stained teak, enamel paint, brass,
porcelain, wallpaper

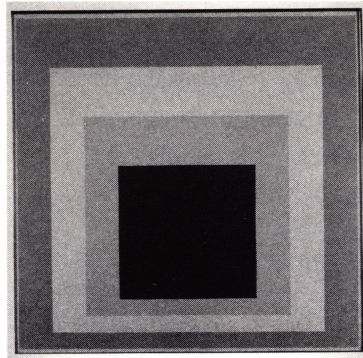
Gift of the Johnson Family Furniture Fund,
1995.14

GALLERY 7

**Willem de Kooning
(American, born the Netherlands)**

Lily Pond (1959), oil on canvas

Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1972.32



GALLERY 7

**Josef Albers
(American, born Germany)**

Homage to The Square:

White Setting (1959)

oil on masonite

Gift of the Woodward Foundation in
memory of Sarah R. Woodward,
wife of Stanley Woodward, 1985.134

GALLERY 8

**Louise Nevelson
(American, born Russia)**

Sky Presence (1960)

wood construction painted black

Purchased with funds from the
Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward
Drummond Libbey, 1986.22

GALLERY 8

**Mark Rothko
(American, born Russia)**

Untitled (1960)

mixed media on canvas

Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1970.55



GALLERY 5

Romare Bearden (American)

Family Dinner (1968)

collage on masonite

Purchased with funds from the
Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward
Drummond Libbey, 1992.17;
© Estate of Romare Bearden 1968

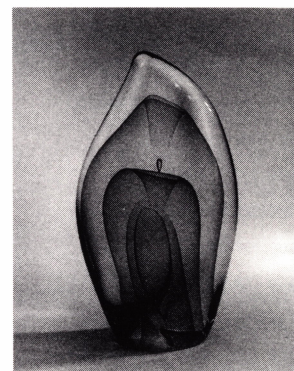
GALLERY 7

Harvey Littleton (American)

Column III (1969)

selenium glass with aluminum base

Museum Purchase, 1970.447



GLASS GALLERIES, UPPER LEVEL

Dominick Labino (American)

Emergence XV (1972)

glass, hot-worked, internal air trap,
gold veiling

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Dominick Labino,
1987.137